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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four 2002 issues of a newsletter that provides current information and research on leadership and administrative issues in early childhood education. The Spring 2002 issue examines Illinois' plan for universal access to preschool by expanding the existing early care and education infrastructure to incorporate Head Start, subsidized and private care, and the prekindergarten program, and by coordinating and financing early care and education services. The Summer 2002 issue focuses on Illinois initiatives to support the infant-toddler workforce and on initiatives in seven states to implement a voluntary infant-toddler credential to overcome barriers to professional development of staff working with very young children. The Fall 2002 issue reports on state efforts to improve the qualifications of early childhood teachers, focusing on strategies related to regulatory efforts, financial assistance, and the development of career lattices. The Winter 2002 issue focuses on early childhood directors' and teachers' perceptions of factors influencing meeting productivity and needs for training to boost meeting facilitators' skills. (KB)

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Research Notes

Published by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National-Louis University SPRING 2002

Illinois Responds to the Need for Universal Access to Preschool

Perhaps the hottest topic at educational conferences, public policy forums, and research symposia during the past year has been universal access to preschool. Indeed the term "universal access to preschool" has become the latest catchphrase in the lexicon of educational jargon. While the models of universal access to preschool that have been implemented in different states vary considerably, all signify a systemic response to the child care trilemma of affordability, quality, and accessibility.

Illinois now has its own blueprint for universal access to preschool, *Ready, Set, Grow – Illinois Preschool*. This report, released in February 2002, creates a framework for providing all three- and four-year-olds in the state with access to high-quality early education programs. Illinois Preschool, the name of this new initiative, will expand the state's existing early care and education infrastructure and incorporate Head Start, subsidized and private child care, and the state's prekindergarten program. It is also a new system for coordinating and financing early care and education services.

Illinois Preschool — Raising the Bar on Quality

The plan will build and expand on the strengths of the state's existing programs to offer high-quality early learning in a variety of settings ranging from child care centers, schools, and family child care homes. Illinois Preschool will meet the needs of each family by offering at least two and a half hours of preschool instruction with a certified teacher in a setting that accommodates the family's schedule. It is envisioned that Illinois Preschool will serve 61,000 children within five years and 202,000 children at full implementation after the ten-year phase-in. The plan calls for implementing Illinois Preschool in six communities in fiscal year 2003. Illinois Preschool will require five critical elements at full implementation in 2012.

- **Professional Staffing**

  Every child will have the opportunity for instruction by a certified teacher holding a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Every child will have the opportunity to benefit from a program administrator holding a master's degree and either an Illinois State Board of Education Administrator Certificate or an Illinois Director Credential, Level III. Assistant teachers will have at least an associate's degree in early childhood education. Because educational requirement will be high for all teachers and staff regardless of setting, salaries will need to be increased in many settings to be commensurate with those paid by local school districts.

- **Well-Designed Curriculum**

  Program content will be based on high-quality standards that align with the Illinois Early Learning Standards and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. Program content as well as teaching practices will be developmentally appropriate and research-based. Program guidelines and curricula will be designed to provide smoother transitions into and out of Illinois Preschool, from birth-to-three services into preschool, from home into preschool, and from preschool to kindergarten. Each program will provide parents with flexible scheduling options for parenting education, family support services, and participation in their children's early learning experiences.

- **Responsiveness to Family Needs**

  Illinois Preschool programs will be based on local needs, culture, and resources. Voluntary, affordable programs will be offered in a variety of settings offering a range of options that includes half-day, school-day, and full-day formats.

"Because educational requirements will be high for all teachers and staff, salaries will be commensurate with those of local school district."

Ready, Set, Grow — Illinois Preschool, p. 4

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- **Strong Parent Involvement**

  Recognizing that parents are children's most important teachers, Illinois Preschool calls for programs designed to offer real opportunities for parental involvement. Therefore, a range of program options to fit parents' schedules will be offered to encourage the development of partnerships between parents and staff. Providing a range of program options to fit parents' varying work schedules will help ensure that all parents have an opportunity to participate in their children's early learning experiences.

- **A Two-Year Program**

  While some states (for example New York and Georgia) are expanding access to preschool for all four-year-olds, Illinois is the only state with a plan to expand access to all three- and four-year-olds. Illinois Preschool programs will be offered for two years based on research showing that investing early brings the biggest benefits.

"While there are clear benefits of quality education at all age levels, Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman of the University of Chicago concludes that the greatest return on investment comes from high-quality programs that serve the very young."

Ready, Set, Grow — Illinois Preschool, p. 7

Illinois Preschool — An Integrated System of Services

Today's early childhood programs are often discouraged from working together because of conflicting goals, regulations, and funding requirements. Illinois Preschool will maximize the coordination of resources to enhance program quality, expand services, improve children's continuity of education and care, and increase collaboration among programs. Illinois Preschool programs will be community-based collaborations among existing and new preschool and child care providers. Each community will assess its own needs and design its own collaboration program based on this assessment. These collaborations will be overseen and funded by an Illinois Preschool Council under the direction of the Governor's Office. The Illinois Preschool Council will be charged with reducing existing policy barriers to collaborations across programs, such as inconsistent regulations regarding parent fees and work requirements, and child and provider eligibility.

Illinois is currently lacking a coherent system of career development in early childhood. To fully implement Illinois Preschool by 2012, the state's higher education infrastructure will require expansion and restructuring. At full implementation, 202,000 children will be served requiring approximately 5,000 new certified teachers. The majority of existing child care and Head Start teachers, assistant teachers, and directors will require additional coursework to meet the professional requirements of Illinois Preschool. Illinois Preschool identifies three immediate priorities:

1. Build the capacity of the higher education community;
2. Create incentives and supports for teachers and staff who need more education; and
3. Coordinate and track professional development and training.

Ready, Set, Grow – Illinois Preschool represents an important first step taken by policymakers in Illinois to prepare all its young children for success in school and to support all families as their children's most important teachers. However, to achieve this vision of universal access to preschool will require the strong building blocks of state-supported child care and early education. Illinois, like most states, is facing a severe budget deficit. In response, the Governor has called for 3% across-the-board budget cuts. It is yet to be determined whether Illinois will maintain its foundational level of child care and early education funding and add Illinois Preschool to the early childhood building blocks.

For more information about Illinois Preschool, contact the Office of the Governor, at 312-814-2121. For further information about research conducted by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, call 800-443-5522, ext. 7703.

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Research Notes

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Supporting the Infant-Toddler Workforce

In 1994, the Carnegie Corporation of New York called the lack of public attention to the importance of the first three years of life "a quiet crisis" of infant and toddler neglect. Over the past decade, in part because of welfare reform, there has been an astounding increase in the number of infants and toddlers being cared for by non-family members. While there has been some media attention given to this as a social phenomenon, there has been little attention given to the importance of infant-toddler caregiver selection, training, or support. In fact, many parents, policymakers, and politicians view the infant-toddler caregiver more as a babysitter than as a professional educator of very young children.

The Birth to Three Project in Illinois is a state-wide, multidisciplinary, multiyear effort led by the Ounce of Prevention Fund to develop a comprehensive and coordinated system of preventative services for expecting parents and families with children birth to age three. The Project's Training and Workforce Development Committee has been working to make recommendations for the development and coordination of a statewide birth to three training and workforce development system that meets the present and future needs of programs and staff that serve young children and their families.

Through focus groups, surveys, and discussions held throughout the state with providers, trainers, and educators, the Committee identified the following barriers to ensuring that practitioners who work with infants and toddlers are adequately prepared and supported to provide the best services possible:

- Opportunities for specialized training for staff who work with infants, toddlers, and their families is limited.
- Finding infant-toddler courses in community colleges or universities is difficult, and few institutions of higher education offer a specialization or certificate in infant-toddler work.
- Illinois lacks a clear career path for those working with very young children and their families.

Research on State Initiatives

The Committee began exploring the development of a voluntary infant-toddler credential as one way to overcome these specific barriers to the professional development of staff working with very young children. As part of this exploration, the Committee completed research on 13 states that have developed either an infant-toddler credential/certificate or a formal training program. The research, conducted in August 2001, found seven states (California, Indiana, Montana, New York, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) with a credential or certificate and six states (Delaware, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Tennessee) with a training program in infant-toddler studies. This multi-state research revealed the following commonalties in the design of infant-toddler training programs, as well as some important "lessons learned" during the process of developing an infant-toddler credential or certificate.

Commonalties

- Ten out of 13 states use the WestEd curriculum, alone or in combination with other materials and resources.
- The training is connected to college credit (3-15 credit hours) in 12 out of 13 states studied.
- There are minimal cost to participants. Financial aid is available through TEACH Scholarships, other state support, or private foundations in all 13 states.

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"An infant-toddler credential would help define quality of care for infants and toddlers and create a career path for staff who work with young children and their families."

Portia Kennel, Co-Chair, Training & Workforce Development Committee

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Lessons Learned

Indiana

- Ensure the program meets the needs of many by having diverse stakeholders represented during the planning stage.
- Many people working in infant-toddler care are not interested in taking classes; others need coursework tailored to their education and literacy levels.
- Provide and maintain good facilitation until the initiative is fully implemented.

Wisconsin

- Adequate substitute care is necessary for most practitioners in order to participate in training.
- Involve the institutions that will be offering credit for the courses from the beginning.
- Developing a curriculum requires at least a full year.

Utah

- Add components to the professional development system over time; this gives many people the opportunity to participate in the process and the process is less overwhelming.

California

- It is difficult but crucial to get underrepresented groups involved.
- Using a consensus approach to decision making is beneficial as it helps ensure that when decisions are made everyone is on board and committed to successful implementation.

Montana

- Although the WestEd training-the-trainers program is expensive, WestEd helps trainers stay informed on the latest early childhood research through online information.
- Training is most effective when attended both by staff and director.

Wyoming

- Decide how the program will be evaluated—it is easier to build this in during the design process than after the program has begun.
- Making the credential a requirement of licensing ensures wide participation.
- Finding a train-the-trainer program that is consistent from year to year is important. (WestEd provides consistent information to trainers and ensures the state's trainers are all delivering the same message to participants.)

New York

- It is very difficult to write an infant-toddler curriculum. Using packaged programs like WestEd may be more cost effective.
- Outreach to providers about the availability of the courses and certificate is essential to the success of the program.
- An infant-toddler certificate can meet the needs of other professionals such as pediatricians and public health nurses.
- It is important to find incentives for institutions of higher education to offer training.

For more information about the Birth to Three Project's Training and Workforce Development Committee, contact Julia DeLapp at 312-922-3863 ext 510, or visit www.ounceofprevention.org.

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Research Notes

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State Efforts to Improve the Qualifications of Early Childhood Teachers

Teacher education and specialized training has been characterized as the "crucial ingredient" in high-quality early care and education environments.[1] A recent research report confirms that early childhood teachers commonly have few educational qualifications, and more importantly, practice without the types of teacher preparation or professional development training that could positively influence the quality of their classrooms. The report, *States' Efforts in Improving the Qualifications of Early Care and Education Teachers*, describes requirements for pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional development in all fifty states as well as initiatives to improve the current situation.[2] The following is a summary of the key findings.

State Requirements for Pre-service Education and Ongoing Professional Development

Although all fifty states require kindergarten teachers to have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree, the pre-service requirements for teachers in state-financed prekindergarten programs and private early childhood settings are markedly different. Of the 42 states that offer state-financed pre-K programs, just over half require teachers in these programs to have a BA in early childhood or another subject. Only one fifth of the states require that teachers in private early childhood education settings undergo *any* pre-service training, much less hold a degree in early childhood education, before assuming their positions.

Data summarized in the report relating to ongoing professional development requirements are just as bleak. The number of annual training hours required for early childhood teachers in private settings across the country ranges from 3 to 24, with the average being just 12 hours. Furthermore, the training sessions that fulfill these hourly requirements are not necessarily linked to the current learning activities in teachers' classrooms nor do they promote opportunities for application and continued learning.

State Initiatives to Improve the Situation

Despite the widely varying licensure requirements across the country, the low salaries that dominate the field, and the constraints facing non-traditional adult learners when they begin or return to college, efforts are underway in a number of states to encourage early childhood teachers to increase their qualifications and knowledge of best practice. These strategies relate to regulatory efforts, financial assistance, and the development of career lattices that delineate pathways for continued learning and improved practice.

Regulatory efforts

Since 1999, five states have improved the qualifications of early childhood staff in private centers by raising minimum pre-service requirements. For example:

- In Massachusetts, entry-level teachers must now have a minimum of three credits in child development as well as nine months of experience, instead of just completing a high school vocational program in child care.
- In Washington, early childhood teachers must now have a minimum of 20 hours of approved training. Previously, there were no pre-service qualifications necessary to begin teaching in a private early childhood setting.

In addition, ten states have raised the number of hours required each year in ongoing in-service training. For states like Montana and New Hampshire—which previously did not require early childhood teachers to participate in any annual training—these efforts represent a positive step in the right direction. However, it is important to note that four of the states that increased requirements for ongoing professional development—Colorado (from 6 to 9 hours), Kentucky (from 10 to 12 hours), North Dakota (from 10 to 13 hours), and Wyoming (from 8 to 15 hours)—still have no minimum pre-service qualifications to work as an early childhood teacher in a private setting.

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Financial efforts

At least 23 states offer some type of monetary assistance to individuals seeking to improve their knowledge of appropriate early childhood teaching practices. These financial efforts include:

- The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) initiative provides scholarships and financial incentives to early childhood teachers to obtain their CDA credential, associate degree, and/or baccalaureate degree.
- The Early Childhood Professional Loan Repayment Program in Colorado provides up to $2000 over two years to teachers employed in child care centers graduating with an AA degree in early childhood.
- The Maine Roads Scholarship Program provides funds for teachers enrolled in early childhood CDA, AA, BA, MA, or doctoral degree programs.

"In some states teachers in private early childhood settings may enter the field without even a high school diploma."

Career lattices

In addition to regulatory and financial efforts, there are also state initiatives designed to delineate the steps early childhood teachers should take to increase their knowledge base and credentials. A career lattice describes the successive education, experience, and/or skills necessary to increase one's professional competence. Although some state career lattice initiatives merely delineate the education and experience needed to become a lead teacher or center director, others efforts have included innovative features. For example:

- New Mexico's six-level career lattice includes an initial 45-hour training experience offered in English, Spanish, and Navajo. The state has also achieved articulation agreements among the two- and four-year colleges for all coursework in the lattice leading to a baccalaureate degree.
- California's career lattice includes Professional Growth Advisors who assist teachers in determining how to improve their credentials.
- Connecticut's Charts-a-Course participants receive individualized career counseling.

Although the United States is a long way from achieving consensus on a unified set of requirements for all early childhood teachers, these various state efforts will help inform ongoing efforts to improve qualifications and enhance the quality of early care and education.

1. Dwyer, M. C., Chait, R., & McKee, P. (2000) *Building strong foundations for early learning: Guide to high quality early childhood education programs.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, p. 6.

2. For more information about how to obtain the full research report, contact Debra J. Ackerman, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University Graduate School of Education at 732-932-7496, ext. 8265 or djackerm@eden.rutgers.edu

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Factors Impacting Meeting Productivity: Directors' and Teachers' Perceptions

Whether it is a weekly staff meeting, a monthly parent meeting, or an annual board meeting, administrators of early childhood programs rely on meetings as the primary vehicle for communicating information, identifying and solving problems, making new decisions, and modifying old ones. Technically defined, a meeting is any formal or informal gathering of three or more individuals with an expressed intent to share information, solve problems, plan events, or promote professional development. Given that meetings are so essential to smooth program functioning, it is important to understand early childhood practitioners' perceptions about the meetings they attend.

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University recently conducted a study of 450 early childhood practitioners from 18 states regarding their perceptions about meetings. Participants completed a two-page questionnaire about meeting productivity. Approximately one-half of the respondents were directors and assistant directors; the other half were teachers. The sample was fairly experienced. Directors averaged 16 years of experience in the field of early childhood; teachers averaged 9 years of experience.

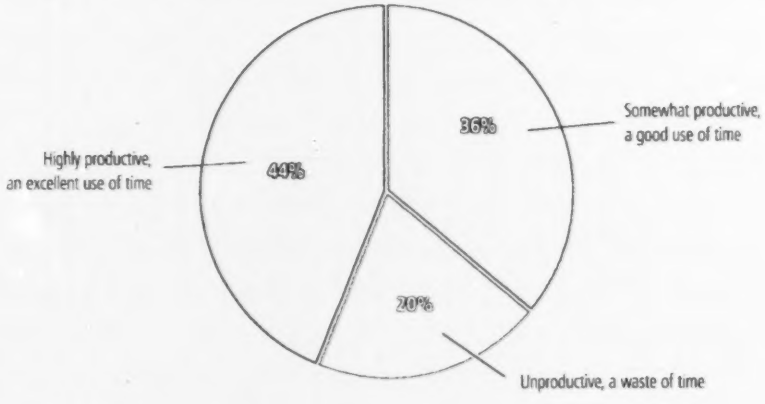
The programs in which respondents worked were private and public, for-profit and nonprofit, half-day and full-day. The average enrollment at respondents' centers was 142 children. Almost three-fourths of the sample (72%) worked in centers that were part of a larger agency, organization, or institution (e.g., hospital, college).

Are Meetings a Good Use of Time?

As would be expected, directors and assistant directors spend more time in meetings than teachers. Administrators report that they spend an average of 6 hours per week attending different types of meetings. Teachers report that they spend only 3 hours per week in work-related meetings. Individuals whose programs are part of a larger agency, organization, or institution spend more time each week in meetings than those working in single-site programs not associated with a larger agency or organization (5 hours vs. 3 hours per week).

Respondents were asked to assess their personal investment of time in meetings by noting the percentage of the meetings they attend that are "highly productive," "somewhat productive," or "unproductive." As can be seen in the pie chart below, respondents indicated that 20% of the time they spend in meetings is "unproductive, a waste of time." They view less than one-half of the time they spent in meetings (44%) as "highly productive, an excellent use of time."

Early Childhood Practitioners' Perceptions about Meeting Productivity



Directors and teachers differ in their perceptions of meeting productivity. Whereas teachers indicate that 23% of the time they spent in meetings is unproductive, directors indicate only 16% of the time they spent in meetings is unproductive. These differences may be due to the fact that directors conduct more meetings and thus may have a greater personal investment in meeting success.

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Which Problems Surface Most Frequently?

From a list of 11 common meeting problems, respondents were asked to indicate those that they felt keep meetings from being more productive. The problems related to how meetings are planned, how they are conducted, and specific elements of the group process that take place during meetings. The following table summarizes the results.

Percentage of Respondents Indicating that the Problem Impacts Meeting Productivity

%	PROBLEM
46	People are reluctant to express their true feelings.
44	The group does not stay on task; it jumps from one topic to another.
44	Participation is not balanced. Some people dominate the discussion.
40	There is insufficient follow-through after the meeting.
34	The agenda is too ambitious; too much to cover in the time allotted.
32	Meetings don't start on time or they don't end on time.
31	People often arrive late or leave early.
29	Decisions are left vague as to what they are and who will carry them out.
28	An agenda is not distributed beforehand. People don't know how to prepare.
28	People talk at the same time and don't listen to each other.
17	No one takes minutes so there isn't an accurate record of what happened at the meeting.

An analysis of the responses to this question provides some insight into how early childhood practitioners feel meetings could be more productive. The top four problems selected relate to meeting facilitation, specifically managing group interactions and keeping the meeting focused. These top four problems were selected by both administrators and teachers.

What Support Do Practitioners Need to Become Better Facilitators?

Respondents were asked to indicate if they regularly lead meetings and if so to rate their level of knowledge and skill as a facilitator. Ninety percent of the directors and assistant directors indicate that they regularly facilitate meetings compared to 25% of the teachers. Only one-fourth of respondents rate themselves as being highly skillful. Fully three-fourths of respondents indicate they could use more training and/or mentoring in meeting facilitation.

In open-ended questions, respondents were asked to indicate what type of support or training would be most helpful in bolstering their knowledge and skill in meeting facilitation. The responses fell into two categories. First, practitioners indicate they need help in getting more balanced participation during meetings. *"I want to learn how to make people feel their ideas are valued but not allow any person to dominate, including myself." "I need to learn to listen more, and talk less."*

The second category of responses relate to establishing accountability during the meeting and ensuring follow-through after the meeting. *"I need help staying on task and balancing my responsibility for facilitating the group with my responsibility for participating in the group." "I need help guiding discussions toward specific action plans, assignments for task accountability, and a timeline for follow-up." "I need to find a balance between getting the work done and meeting the needs of participants for support, fun, and expressing themselves."*

What are the Implications for Training and Practice?

Over the span of a 25-year career, the typical director will spend over 7,800 hours attending and conducting meetings. If a fifth of that time is perceived as unproductive, the implications for program effectiveness and the job satisfaction of the early childhood workforce may be serious. The results of this study have practical implications for both training and public policy as they relate to current efforts to stabilize and professionalize the early childhood workforce. When planned and conducted well, meetings can be a powerful tool for fostering greater commitment to early care and education. If run poorly, however, meetings can be a waste of time, a waste of public and private dollars, and a real source of tension among staff.

Early childhood practitioners indicate that they need training to improve the caliber of the meetings they attend and those they conduct. Specifically, gaining the skills to help groups achieve balanced participation, stay on task, ensure adequate follow-through, and promote open communication should help improve overall organizational effectiveness and practitioners' commitment to the field of early care and education.

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